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WARWICK'S WATER INFRASTRUCTURE IS A 'HIDDEN ASSET'

Plays critical role in protecting public health and the environment and promoting economic prosperity

October 2008 – Water infrastructure is a “hidden asset” that plays a critical role in protecting public health and the environment and promoting economic prosperity. That’s the message of “Rhode Island Water Infrastructure Month”, a campaign designed to raise awareness of several key infrastructure issues related to drinking water and the clean water systems that handle wastewater and storm water.

As part of this campaign, the Warwick Sewer Authority (WSA) invites the public to get a first-hand glimpse at their operations during an open house on Saturday, October 25 from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. The WSA is located at 125 Arthur Devine Boulevard (off Jefferson Boulevard and next door to the Warwick Animal Shelter.)

The statewide campaign is meant to highlight:

- A funding gap between the RI Department of Environmental Management’s 207-project, \$957-million priority wastewater project list and actual funding available to them and various other agencies.
- The wide range of municipalities, agencies, and individuals who work to keep Rhode Island’s water flowing as cost-effectively as possible.
- The success stories at the municipal and state levels that have helped protect public health and the environment.
- The role of government (state and local) in protecting and improving Rhode Island’s water infrastructure resources and the strong coordination among agencies that exists here in the State.
- Current project needs and the critical funding gaps that exist for water infrastructure improvements.

Warwick built its first wastewater treatment facilities in 1965. The City has spent millions of dollars upgrading and expanding its system, increasing flow capacity, and installing equipment to meet increasingly stringent discharge limits for nutrients. With thirteen operators and mechanics, the O&M staff oversees the wastewater facility and 46 pumps stations. Based on current projections, the staff may be responsible for maintaining an additional 10 pump stations as the collection system expands to the outlying areas of the city. Warwick’s wastewater facility discharges to the Pawtuxet River. DEM recently sent Warwick a draft permit which calls for further reductions in nitrogen and phosphorus in their effluent discharge.

“Not many people realize the tremendous amount of work that goes into maintaining our water infrastructure and how critical it is to daily life,” said Joel Burke of the Warwick Sewer Authority. “Building and maintaining community water infrastructure systems is a fundamental role of state and local government.”

RI has 16 major municipal wastewater treatment facilities, plus three facilities operated by quasi-state entities—Narragansett Bay Commission and Quonset Development Corporation. These facilities operate all day, every day, to make polluted water clean, in accordance with increasing treatment expectations. In total, these facilities produce 140 million gallons of drinking water and treat about 100 million gallons of sewage every day. Much of the wastewater collection and treatment process takes place underground. 484 public water supply systems meet the

state's drinking water needs—which includes those of residential and industrial customers, as well as public safety systems, such as fire suppression.

"Our water infrastructure is at work every time we turn on the faucet, take a shower, or swim at the beach," says U.S. Senator Sheldon Whitehouse (D-RI), a member of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee. "Most of us take clean water for granted, but the systems that keep our water safe for drinking and clean for recreation are under heavy stress. We need more resources to upgrade Rhode Island's aging sewage treatment plants and water delivery systems to meet the demands of the 21st century."

Statewide there are approximately:

- 4000 miles of drinking water pipes
- 1250 miles of sewer lines (ranging from 8 inches to more than 8 feet in diameter)
- 370 pump stations (which total about 1000 pumps)
- More than 500 state-licensed professionals operating and maintaining Rhode Island's water infrastructure
- The oldest drinking water pipes date back to 1871 and some sewer lines are over 100 years old

"Communities in Rhode Island and throughout New England must continue to invest in clean water and drinking water infrastructure in order to ensure safe drinking water, protect public health and make water quality improvements," said Robert Varney, Regional Administrator for the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). "Further, the lack of adequate drinking water and sewer infrastructure can result in increased public health concerns, contaminated drinking water, closed beaches and reduced economic activity. State Revolving Fund (SRF) grants provided by EPA to the RI SRF will help municipalities in Rhode Island replace and upgrade critical infrastructure. Providing low interest loans through the RI SRF can significantly reduce the cost of these projects to the ratepayers."

Varney recently presented state officials with checks totaling more than \$12.5 million dollars in federal FY 2008 capitalization grant funds. These funds will be used to provide low interest loans for municipal clean water and drinking water infrastructure projects throughout Rhode Island, significantly lowering the overall cost of these important infrastructure projects.

Rhode Island Water Infrastructure Month will culminate with the airing of two important educational programs on Rhode Island PBS on October 30th from 8:00-10:00pm. The first, *Liquid Assets: The Story of Our Water Infrastructure*, is a national documentary which explores the history, engineering, and political and economic challenges of our water infrastructure, and engages communities in local discussion about public water and wastewater issues.

Liquid Assets will be immediately followed by *Hidden Assets: Rhode Island's Water Infrastructure*, a Rhode Island PBS-produced roundtable program featuring local water infrastructure experts. The panel will include W. Michael Sullivan, Ph.D., Director, RI Department of Environmental Management; Pamela Marchand, Chief Engineer and General Manager, Providence Water Supply Board; Raymond J. Marshall, PE, Executive Director, Narragansett Bay Commission, Anthony Simeone, Executive Director, RI Clean Water Finance Agency. The roundtable discussion will be moderated by Maureen Moakley, Associate Professor, University of Rhode Island.

Organizations participating in Rhode Island Water Infrastructure Month include the RI Department of Environmental Management (DEM), RI Department of Health (HEALTH), RI Clean Water Finance Agency (RICWFA), Narragansett Water Pollution Control Association (NWPCA), Narragansett Bay Commission (NBC), US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), Providence Water Supply Board (PWSB), RI Water Works Association (RIWWA) and municipal water authorities and agencies throughout the state.

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